



## Reactionary Petty-Bourgeois Utopia

To understand the controversies of the present day intelligently (to borrow a phrase from the attached text), one needs to go back. We went back to Engels' 1872 book on "The Housing Question". Today we go back to Lenin, in 1905.

Lenin's "[Petty Bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism](#)" is an example of the antipathy of both these writers towards "reactionary petty-bourgeois utopia". Both Engels and Lenin opposed the liberal view of emancipation, whereby the worker's household is re-constituted as a miniature image of the bourgeois household.

The relevance of it is also to the concept of “development”, a word that is not used in Lenin’s article, by the way. But clearly, Lenin is looking at a situation wherein “development” in our modern, vulgar sense is very much on the agenda, i.e.: The masses are poor. Something must be done.

Lenin points out the class realities:

*“Will the fullest liberty and expropriation of the landlords do away with commodity production? No, it will not.*

*“...after destroying the power of the bureaucracy and the landlords, it will set up a democratic system of society, without, however, altering the bourgeois foundation of that democratic society, without abolishing the rule of capital.”*

Lenin, already in 1905, 15 years before he launched the concept of the National Democratic Revolution in the report-back of the Commission on the National and Colonial Question to the Second Congress of the Communist international in 1920, had fully grasped the necessity of such an NDR and its close relationship to the trajectory of social development in its full, dialectical sense. He writes:

*“Can a class-conscious worker forget the democratic struggle for the sake of the socialist struggle, or forget the latter for the sake of the former? No, a class-conscious worker calls himself a Social-Democrat for the*

*reason that he understands the relation between the two struggles. He knows that there is no other road to socialism save the road through democracy, through political liberty.”*

But Lenin refuses to allow the revolution to ossify into any sort of equivalent to the idea of a static, perpetual “National Democratic Society”. He says:

*“The peasants' struggle against the landlords is now a revolutionary struggle; the confiscation of the landlords' estates at the present stage of economic and political evolution is revolutionary in every respect, and we back this revolutionary-democratic measure. However, to call this measure "socialisation", and to deceive oneself and the people concerning the possibility of "equality" in land tenure under the system of commodity production, is a **reactionary petty-bourgeois utopia**, which we leave to the socialist-reactionaries.”*

What is a reactionary petty-bourgeois utopia? The illustration above, a German Nazi poster dating from about 25 years after Lenin wrote the linked article, implies a reconstruction and development programme that is purely utilitarian and even innocent. The progress that it offers appear to offer the static end of progress. It is the kind of thing that Paulo Freire referred to as “necrophilia”.

Please download the document, read it and appreciate the extraordinary clarity and foresight that Lenin was able to

achieve, aged 35, in 1905, and how much of it rings true, today.

- The above serves to introduce the original reading-text: [Petty-bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism, 1905, Lenin.](#)
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